

tapes preserve oldtimers' stories of life in earlier Hawaii

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Clinton Kanahele grew up in Hana some 70 years ago and watched in fascination the life of the Hawaiians there.

He learned Hawaiian. He knew their customs and their way of life. He never forgot the colorful life on Maui.

After Kanahele moved to Oahu and spent 46 years as a school principal, he began to see the old customs begin to fade and the Hawaiian language begin to die.

HE KNEW THAT perhaps someday the stories of old Maui would be gone so for the past year and a half, using tape recorders borrowed from the Church College of Hawaii, Kanahele

has been interviewing 30 former childhood friends. They speak in Hawaiian.

The tapes, which he has donated to the Church College, will help preserve the language, and remind people of the flavor of old Hawaii.

Kanahele's collection of tapes (with written English and Hawaiian translations) are filled with oldsters' memories of the Hawaii of their childhood.

THESE ARE, of course, not the first tapes of this kind. Kanahele credits Mary Pukui, co-author of the Hawaiian-English dictionary, who made recordings for the Bishop Museum, as "Hawaii's greatest living authority on the Hawaiian language."

But Kanahele's tapes add to the knowledge of Hawaii culture. He himself has credits to back his mission. Kanahele has a B.A. and Masters in Education, three years of law school, and has taken courses in Hawaiian botany and religion.

Kanahele's interviews tell a story of life in Hana at the turn of the century in the words of the people who lived it.

In those days, he said, the waters were filled with fish, shrimp and lobsters. "You could stand at the edge of the beach and see the water run with fish.

"What I used to think was superstition, I now tend to believe. Men did not want to be disturbed on their way to fish. They believed in



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mana. They could work out in their minds before they went fishing how they would catch the fish. They did not want to break the mana that would give them success.

"HAWAIIANS didn't deify sharks. They domesticated them. They fed them in the water and handled the fish so the fish knew their smell. One man said he saw a whale shark which had been a family pet for years.

"Scientists don't know much about fish now. We shouldn't be so quick to disbelieve. The Hawaiians lived with the ocean for hundreds of years. We domesticate birds, dogs, cows, why not fish? People tell about a little boy drowning and a dog jumps in to save him. A Hawaiian tells about a fish saving a man and people disbelieve."

The old people Kanahele talked to bemoaned the destruction of the fisheries. In earlier days, fishing was restricted to certain seasons and hours. A fisherman shared his catch with the entire village.

"We hardly had to go to the store except for kerosene and flour. Our homes were bamboo frame 'grass shacks' with roofs of ti leaves. I lived in one briefly as a child," Kanahele said.

MEDICINE in those days blended herb therapy and spirituality.

One woman told Kanahele how she gave birth to more than 12 children with her father acting as midwife.

When the hour for delivery neared, hau bark was soaked in water to produce a jelly-like substance which was drunk by the woman

for lubrication. Her father-in-law said the woman's stomach to turn the baby if the child was not in a position to come out head-first. After birth she ate the juice of noni plants to rid herself of blood clots and took a walk.

Kanahele said the woman asked her daughters to have her as their midwife, but all of them go to doctors and hospitals.

KANAHELE TOOK botany courses from Dr. Harold St. John at the University of Hawaii several years ago to further his understanding of Hawaiian plants.

Four elderly Hawaiians told Kanahele of broken bones being mended with laau kahea (spoken medicine). The Hawaiian "doctor" would speak to the broken area and say that it is mending. The patient would reply affirmatively. The old people said that laau kahea worked very well.

"The Hawaiians believed in mind over matter," Kanahele said. "Two other people told me of seeing a kahuna stand in front of a cut banana plant and making it grow in one day.

"I don't believe everything that I heard from these interviews; but that it is important that these memories be preserved."

In another interview, an 80-year-old Windward Oahu woman told Kanahele about lua wrestling. She described the holds, thrusts, kicks, which make up the bone-breaking sport that resembles aikido.

Kanahele said the art of lua is almost dead because those who knew the wrestling could not find suitable students to teach.

"Manase Makekau, who was a legislator from Molokai before he died (1946), took lua with Prince Ku-

hio," Kanahele recalled. "Makekau was a good friend of mine and told me he would not teach the lua. He said you might select the wrong kind of student who could get easily angry and kill someone. The stu-

dent must be of a calm, collected disposition."

Kanahele said his research has all been a "work of love" which is why he donated his recordings and translations to Church College of Hawaii rather than

accepting a research grant.

Kanahele said he could continue for many more years collecting Hawaii's customs on recordings if he could find a secretary who knew both Hawaiian and English to help him type.